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Dividing Perennials

When to Divide

- Divide when plant isn't flowering or getting ready to flower
- Divide when plant's new leaves are just coming out or its old leaves are mature
- Divide in the Spring or early Fall
- Divide on a cloudy day when rain is predicted
- Divide at least six weeks before the onset of Winter cold or Summer heat

How to Divide

- **Bulbs** -- Perennials that grow from bulbs, corms, tubers or other underground storage organs are all very easy to divide. Be aware that they may not flower well for a year or two after being divided
 1. Dig around edge of the clump as deep as possible to loosen the soil
 2. Lift up the whole clump and shake off extra soil
 3. Pick, pluck or snap plants apart leaving the roots and leaves attached
 4. Discard any plants that are bruised, cut or damaged
 5. To replant, place bulbs individually, burying them as deep as they were before
- **Tough Clumps** -- Astilbes are an example of the type of perennial that forms very dense clumps of foliage and flower stalks, with equally dense clumps of roots. The crown is usually so tight and tough that you will need a sharp tool and a strong arm to split it into 3-4 divisions
 1. Dig a circle around the edges at least 3 times as wide as the crown of the plant
 2. Pry underneath with your tool and lift the whole clump up and out
 3. Hose off some of the soil, cut with a sharp tool in equal sections trying to aim as you go
 4. Replant keeping the top of the crown level with the soil
- **Mats and Patches** -- Perennials that spread in this way usually make good ground covers, but in a flowerbed they should be divided every few years to limit their size and to renew their appearance. Mats and patches have new shoots sprout up from all parts of them, forming a dense patch with lots of foliage and dozens of flower stalks
 1. To renew a plant that you are going to replant in the same place, choose the best part of the patch digging around it then lifting it out and setting it aside. Tear out the rest of the patch, amend the soil and replant to division you saved
 2. To start new plants without disturbing the mother patch, use a sharp spade to cut blocks or wedges about 3-6" from around the edge of the patch. Lift them out, transplant and refill the holes with fresh soil
 3. To divide an entire patch as a whole before cutting it, cut it all into squares, lifting them one at a time, or lift the patch as a whole before cutting it
 4. Large divisions rarely need special care, if the divisions are small, water and watch them carefully to prevent drying out

- **Clumps** - Primroses are an example of a clump. Each year's rosettes form right next to the old ones and the plant soon makes a dense clump.
 1. The best time to divide will be right after blooming, every three to four years. They can be divided in late Summer or Fall as long as the leaves are still green
 2. Dig all around the plant a few inches beyond the edge of the leaves. Lift it out of the ground and shake out the soil
 3. Choose a rosette and pinch it firmly where the leaves and roots come together. Snap it off or use a shears or knife to sever the connection pulling or prying away from the clump
 4. Replant the division promptly firming soil over roots, but don't bury the leaf bases